

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/6614182) at  
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Rating:	<a href="#">Teen And Up Audiences</a>
Archive Warning:	<a href="#">Graphic Depictions Of Violence</a>
Fandom:	<a href="#">The Curious Incident Of The Dog In The Night-Time</a> , <a href="#">House Rules - Fandom</a> , <a href="#">The Rosie Project</a> , <a href="#">Real Person Fiction</a>
Relationship:	<a href="#">masturbation - Relationship</a>
Character:	<a href="#">Mark Haddon</a> , <a href="#">Don Tilman</a> , <a href="#">Christopher Boone</a> , <a href="#">Tarzan</a> , <a href="#">Jacob Hunt</a> , <a href="#">Emma Hunt</a> , <a href="#">Theodore Hunt</a>
Additional Tags:	<a href="#">Autism Awareness</a> , <a href="#">hatefic</a> , <a href="#">fixfic</a>
Stats:	Published: 2016-04-21 Chapters: 20/? Words: 11120

## Who Let The Dogs Out?

by [Curiousonscreen](#)

*Come Together* performed by *The Beatles*

Mark Barnum Haddon is my name and I wrote *The Curious Incident Of The Dog In The Night-Time*. For some inexplicable reason, people want me to speak about autism at conferences. I won't. I explained why on my blog:

“i did no research for *curious incident* (other than photographing the interiors of swindon and paddington stations). i'd read oliver sacks's essay about temple grandin and a handful of newspaper and magazine articles about, or by, people with asperger's and autism. i deliberately didn't add to this list. [imagination always trumps research](#).”

That was an excellent paragraph. I rewarded myself with another shot of vodka. Shame about what happened to my shift-key, but that's what I get for blogging in the bath. As an atheist, I despise dishonesty, but there was nothing disingenuous about my excuse. Pouring the rest of my vodka into the bubbles, I went on to repudiate a misconception spread by my publisher.

“*curious incident* is not a book about asperger's. it's a novel whose central character describes himself as 'a mathematician with some behavioural difficulties'. indeed he never uses the words “asperger's” or “autism” (i slightly regret that fact that the word “asperger's” was used on the cover).”

Slight regret was an understatement. Questions about autism have been the bane of my existence since 2003. What do these people, marginalized in employment and persecuted in schools, want from me? Is it wrong to profit from the misrepresentation of an already stigmatized group? My face has long wrinkles beneath my eyes, tracks worn into my skull by my tears of slight irritation at being judged by critics with autism. Every night I fall asleep by beating my chest in despair, thinking of all those well-intentioned people wanting me to “talk about asperger's”.

“i would much rather spend my time writing more novels, standing up for difference and trying to understand outsiders who see the world in surprising and revealing ways.”

The way that I understand outsiders is by ventriloquising them in fiction. I've got another novel, *A Spot of Bother*, about a [hypocondriac retiree](#). My play *Polar Bears* is about [bipolar](#) and my telemovie *Coming Down The Mountain* depicts a [boy's attempt to murder his brother with Down Syndrome](#). [I haven't done a transgendered character yet, but I quite fancy that as a subject](#).

Satisfied with my post, I stepped out of my bath and admired myself in my full-length mirror. The tattoo of Margaret Thatcher on my right thigh was moist with bubbles. On the opposite thigh my self-portrait grinned. When my thighs rub together I imagine there is still love in our world.



## Chapter 2



“She who fights with monsters should be careful lest she thereby become a monster. And if thou gaze long into Mark Haddon, Mark Haddon will also gaze into thee.”

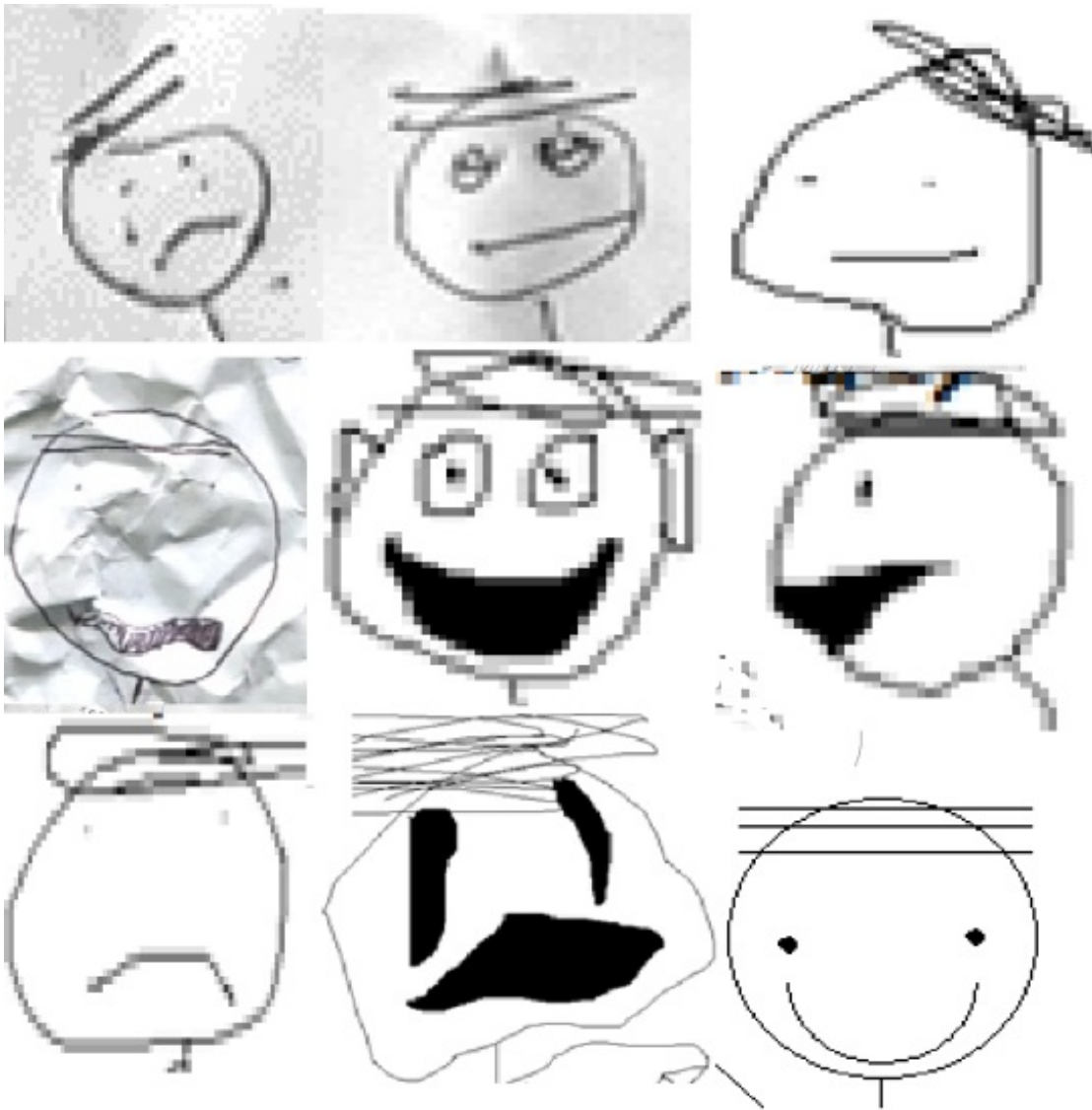
[Jacob Hunt](#)

“What I find objectionable is that he seems unaware of - or, worse, indifferent toward - the fact that he has made both his name and his fortune exploiting the Asperger’s community.”

[Greg Olear](#)

“If you don’t go over the top, you can’t see what’s on the other side.”

[Jim Steinman](#)



To  
All those who give *Curious Incident* a one star review,  
And those who read the book for school,  
This one's for you.

*O Superman* performed by Laurie Anderson

Every chapter in this story is an odd number, just like the author.



## Chapter 4

*Original Sin performed by Pandora's Box*

It was two minutes to midnight. I relieved myself upon my favorite tree in Oxford, a deathly pale oak overlooking the local free-range boarding kennels. A black wind howled through a cold city sleeping under shining stars. The only other sound, besides my faint trickle, was that of several boisterous beagles barking bombastically. But then I heard something explode and sniffed the whiff of gelignite. By the time I reached the kennel gates they had been reduced to nothing more than a mess of iron and stone, not a canine to be found.

“Who let the dogs out?”

I turned around and saw a tall firefighter staring at me. “Excuse me?”

“Was it you?” she asked.

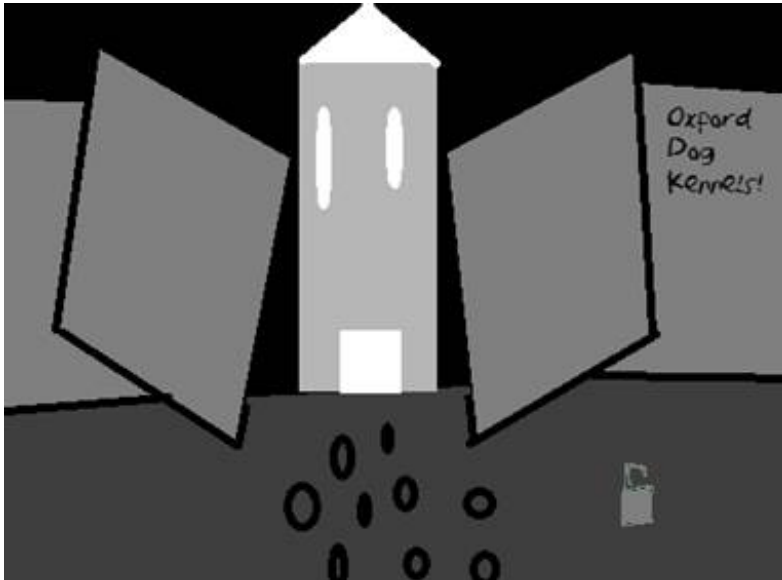
“Wasn’t me!”

“I’m going to have to take you down to the station for questioning.”

“Excuse me?”

“Come now! Or should I use excessive force?” she barked.

This was a clear threat to my civil liberties. I didn’t like it one bit. And that is when I refused to go along with her.



## Chapter 5

*Broken Head* performed by Brian Eno & Cluster

My brain is a broken bread machine.



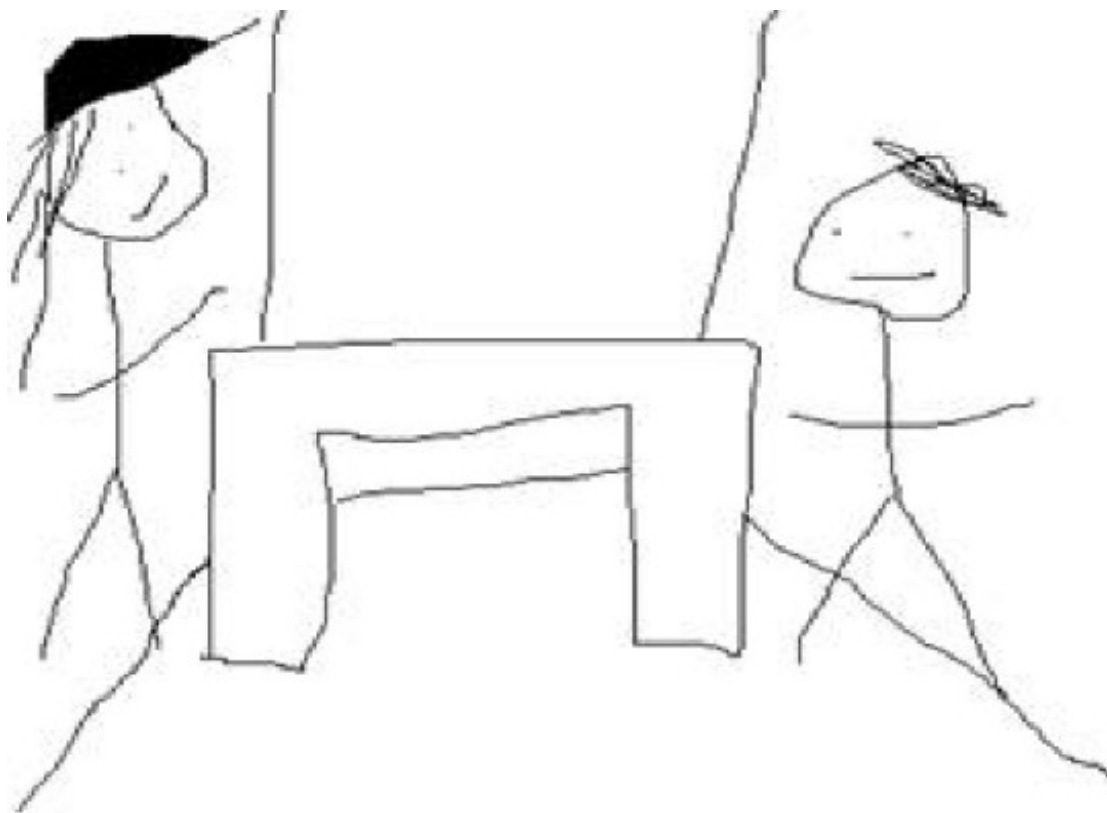


## Chapter 6

*Cursum Perfico* performed by Enya

I realized something was askew upon visiting the facilities at the fire station, half an hour later. Now I'm not one to write loving descriptions of [toilets](#), but even I realized that something quite illegal must be going on when the only stall was completely void of toilet paper, yet had a dog-eared copy of *The Curious Incident Of The Dog In The Night-Time* lying in a dirty puddle on the floor. Quickly I deduced that this whole scenario had been engineered to humiliate me and therefore decided not to participate, despite feeling a somewhat pressing need to dump a trump.

Besides, I prefer to use the *Daily Mail*.



The firefighter was waiting outside the hallway, a ghoulish grin distorting her otherwise pinched features. She escorted me to an unused storage room where we sat on opposite sides of a plastic table.

“I am Siobhan Bakhtin. I will be interviewing you about the kennel escape.” she said by way of introduction.

“Why?” I ask. “Wouldn’t that be a police matter?”

Siobhan shrugged her shoulders at me, a tad aggressively. “Turns out that a country where it rains perpetually doesn’t actually need a full-time fire department, so the police send firefighters like me to deal with minor matters while they accuse people of terrorism. You should see them, enforcing their harsh anti-terror laws all over Suffolk. I say to them, there’s never been a terrorist incident in Suffolk, they cross their arms and reply that the laws work even better than they think.” She paused, finding her way back on track. “I’ve read your book.”

“Did you like it?”

She wrinkled her nose. “Was it popular?”

I smiled, happy to go plug myself. “Too popular. [It's like you want to be Radiohead, then you think, shit, I've accidentally turned into Coldplay.](#)”

“More like Crazy Frog. Enormously popular, but quickly fading from the cultural landscape making no impact beyond proving extremely irritating to people of good taste. If you don't like being popular, this is your day...” She cleared her throat. “Now, I'm told that you worked as a script-writer and box-officer... But what interests me are the rumors that you worked with autistics. Can you elaborate?”

“No. Apparently I worked at an [Adult Training Centre in North London](#), but I rarely go into such explicit detail.”

“Fair enough. What do you know about autism?”

“I know very little about the subject. To present myself as some kind of expert in the field would make me look [like a fool](#).” I smirked.

“Yet by writing your book, that is exactly what you did. Why didn't you do any research?”

I drummed my fingers on the table. “It goes a little something like this...”

## Chapter 7

*[Bring Me To Life](#) performed by Evanescence*

I find research difficult. There are two reasons for this.

The first is that it involves a lot of reading. I've got no time for that. I look at those books and I see tedious word-mazes. Who needs that stuff! Citations? Footnotes? [Newspaper articles and documentaries](#) are as far as I go. No, I just lean back on my chair and research my eyelids. Pretend you know what it's like to be someone else. Corral all the stereotypes, all those myths pulled from a cinematic culture that values sentiment over sense and filter through your prejudices, and the result is a sensitive portrayal of a misunderstood minority. I can publish any drivel about autism that I want and if anyone calls me out, who will listen to them? Research takes effort and I know that I'll be rewarded far more if I regurgitate the clichés my audience will recognize.

The second is that I don't give a damn.

## Chapter 8

*[Private Life](#) performed by Grace Jones*

Siobhan was impressed. “That was surprisingly honest.”

“Aren’t you meant to be asking me about the dogs?” I asked.

“The dogs are not important.”

“I don’t understand.”

“You will.” The diabolical firefighter laughed and began reading from her phone. “Mark Barnum Haddon knows nothing of any country besides Britain and isn’t entirely sure what a prime number is. He can’t draw very well and has no understanding of research ethics. He cannot stand to have his integrity questioned. And he detests Americans. Cursed with an inability to press his [shift key](#), for fifty three-year-old Mark empiricism and the perspectives of autistics have little meaning. He lives on lies, self-congratulation, and a flask of vodka clasped in his sweaty hand. Then one night, the dogs are let out and it’s judgement day for his little solipsistic wonderland. Marks sets out to deny the truth in the style of his favorite (illogical) liar, Lance Armstrong. What follows makes for a novel that is furious, parodic and violently cathartic in its portrayal of a self-satisfied, yet self-loathing, bore.”

“What are you talking about?” I asked.

“I’m satirizing you!” she snorted. “Imagination trumps research, remember? You think in lists and you really hate yellow.”

“The yellow thing was a [ZZT reference](#), and besides, I do neither of those things!”

“Who said this story was about you?” Siobhan asked. “I never said that my character was Mark Haddon. Indeed, he only refers to himself as a mark with haddonical difficulties. If [Mark Haddon were real he wouldn’t have written this novel](#). It’s too good for that.”

“How can you say that the narrator who narrates your book can’t narrate?”

“I think you’ve missed the point. This novel is not about its protagonist, it’s about us, sorry, I mean it’s about real people like me. Besides, Mark Haddon only narrates about a third of the book. The rest is in third person. That you assumed he’d be narrating the whole thing is telling, I think.”

“Your justifications are crap!” I said.

“All my justifications are the same ones you gave for *Curious Incident*. You can hardly complain when the standard you apply to others is used against yourself.”

“Now you’re just putting words in my mouth! I never wanted to *hurt* anyone.”

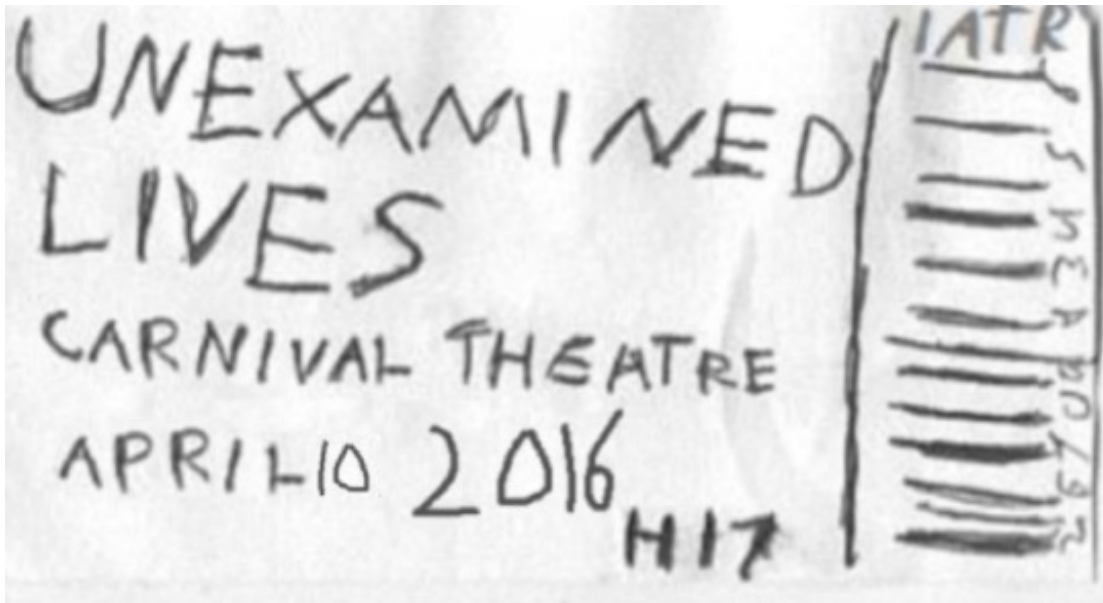
“Despite your lukewarm protestations, reviewers of the stage adaption still think [Christopher’s autistic](#). And to this day, some real naive innocents think that *Curious* is a [guided tour of an autistic’s head](#). You rely on that perception to sell your book and deny it whenever your integrity is questioned. You’re a hypocrite.”

“Can I go now?”

“My drama troupe is performing a play I wrote down at the Carnival Theater. If you go see it I’ll stop harassing you. It should prove most... didactic.”

“Sure.”

She handed me a ticket and led me out of the station. “I’m struggling to think of nice things to say to you. Uh, while it’s true that we should all [pay our taxes](#), the pride with which you say it makes you come across a bit as a pompous bore. [Books for prisoners](#), another smooth move. And while the pictures for [\*Gilbert’s Gobstopper\*](#) are uninspired, the premise is interesting enough that I’d give it a go if it was written by someone I could respect. Really, you’d be relatively inoffensive if your book wasn’t so fucking offensive!”



## Chapter 9

There is nothing I relish more than the thrill of running around train stations threatening commuters with my Swiss Army Knife. Whisper the name “Mark Haddon” anywhere this side of East Cheam and you will hear of a train elf demanding directions to the nearest public bathroom. Pinocchio has his nose, Prince Charles his ears, and I my marvelous knife. To sketch an image of me without it is to miss my essence. Could that someone perhaps perchance be Mark the Knife?

## Chapter 10

*[Digging In The Dirt](#) performed by Peter Gabriel*

I drove my [Aston Martin](#) to the Carnival Theater, waved my ticket in the usher's face and was led to my seat. The play was called *Unexamined Lives*. The protagonist was the late Andrew Wakefield, who first claimed that vaccinations cause autism.

Reading the program, I learn that the first neurotypical was [Cain](#). Other historical figures now known to be neurotypical include Benedict Arnold, Al Capone and Adolf Hitler. The program went on to argue that Wakefield's instinct for treachery and fraud made him the ultimate neurotypical and that the world would be a healthier place if he were never born, supporting these claims with quotations from a [beloved eye-witness account](#) and controversial [research](#). Apparently this session was meant to be a neurotypical-friendly performance, so each scene would begin with inane small talk and contain no word longer than four syllables.

As the curtain rose, a woman and boy walked onto the stage. Through the opaque fog emanating from the long, brown sticky candles on both sides of the stage, the woman sang "Theo, you know that Jacob is a nineteen-year-old child with autism, you must look after him."

Theo chanted "Jacob's disabled, that's *baad*! I'm his brother, that makes me *saad*! The only thing worse than being a person with autism is being related to one! That's it MOM, I'm going to my room to listen to *Coooooldplay*!"

Other singers appeared and formed a circle. "We easily find relationships and employment, but we scream the loudest! We use our children as props and tweet their meltdowns! Pity us and listen to-"

"The dOOOOOOOOctor of disaster will speak, from his behind-ah!" farted Andrew Wakefield as he roller-bladed on stage, using his gaseous fumes as a sickening propellant.

"No!" cried Siobhan, running into the circle wearing a sparkly leotard. "This man is a liar, a wicked truth defiler, his fraud withdrawn by *The Lancet*, it was so rancid, Wakefield's the best friend measles ever had, everything he does is bad."

Theo's mother gave Siobhan a dirty look, softly singing "Sweetie, that may be *true*, but the doctor says he can make our children *anew*. If you want to be taken seriously you must look people in the eye."

The circle tightens, excluding Siobhan.

In front of me, two theater critics conversed.

"Some moms are just looking for a cross public enough to hang on." commented one wearing a blue jumper, with that certain suspicious glamour that only an American accent can provide. I don't trust people who sound like they're from the telly.

"I don't get the smoke. Why is there so much smoke?" The second critic's nasal drawl did nothing to camouflage the mixture of bestial cunning and resentful servility that marked him as an Australian. He was tall and wore an expensive Gore-tex jacket.

“This faecal fog represents the intellectual and sensory numbness in which neurotypicals live their lives. Their minds are so fundamentally alien that they can only be represented through expensive stage gimmicks. Not very PC, I know.”

The other dancers impersonate swaying trees as Siobhan gets her dramatic monologue. “Tarzan was a girl raised by jungle apes. Her family berated her for not walking on her knuckles like a proper primate. Moving this way was painful for her. The apes ostracized her for her smoothness and intelligence. They would catalogue the ways she differed from them and call these differences deficiencies, practicing psychology. She earned their respect by head-butting a leopard to death, showing how they could exploit her skills. That she would never meet an equal was ensured by venereal disease. Two years later a British expedition was moved by the primitive [funerals](#) the apes gave for Tarzan.” Siobhan did a barking laugh and ran off stage.

The Australian was not impressed. “Now the last thing that I would ever want to do is come across as some SJW Tumblerina, but that last bit there was super problematic. Comparing neurotypicals to apes? [Somehow that feels racist.](#)”

“But [neurotypicals are apes](#). And what about implying that autistics [aren't even](#) human by representing them as aliens or robots? Is that problematic?” asked the American. “I’d much rather be a jungle bum. Be quiet, here comes my favorite bit...”

Now Wakefield was walking down an alley and was mugged by three anonymous criminals, who beat the quack within an inch of his life before leaving him to suffer alone, weeping. The audience burns with hilarity, laughter like thunder, ricocheting up and down the theater walls like bullets, as though they’ve just witnessed some harmless Adam Sandler pratfall, not an extremely distressing ordeal like I just did!

That’s the end of Act One. My hip-flask was empty, so I headed out to the theater lobby to see if they have anything to drink. I hear the American critic comment to his associate: “See, the writer’s just trying to figure out what the NT equivalent of a meltdown is and see whether they’re as [willing to laugh to laugh](#) at that kind as well.”

Throughout the show, whenever somebody says “with autism”, people throw plastic spoons onto the stage. They run out as Simon Baron-Cohen performs an operatic rendition of the Kazakhstan national anthem, vigorously shaking his booty to distract copyright lawyers from the fact the he plagiarized his Extreme Male Brain theory from [Alan Alda](#). Spectators clamber onto stage to retrieve their cutlery during the epic sax solo in his well-meaning, yet typically patronizing, song ***I Overgeneralize When I Say She Empathizes And He Systematizes.***

The play climaxed with Wakefield’s trial, the judge singing, “In all years of judging I have never seen before a more transparent case of medical fraud, *woo!* What have you, *hee-hee*, got to say for yourself?”



“Just one thing, one little phrase that justifies, so, so much.” Wakefield farted with a deafening blast. “Imagination always trumps research.”

In the [second-most musical verdict](#) I’ve ever heard, the judge banged his gavel and sang, “That is the most stupendously-self-servingly-silly thing I’ve ever heard, *BABY* ! Since you seem to hate proper medicine so much, *oo-ho*, this court bars you from using proper medicine in the future!”

As Wakefield left the court he accidentally scars himself on a legal document and the resulting infection develops into a severe case of Terminal Anal Loquaciousness.

Six months later, after narrowly escaping being torn limb to limb by a flock of overworked doctors chasing him from the Tribeca Film Festival, Wakefield blasts into a dark reprise of *I’m Bringing Measles Back*. From his morrison he unleashes seven sulfuric stench storms, his body deflating with each ghastly gust. By the third chorus of Wakefield’s theme song the quack has shrunk down to the size of a quokka, a quail egg, a quark. Then nothing.

A chorus line somersaulted onto the stage, including singing “Tedious and *treacherous*, with stabbing *eyes* and hearts *vacuous*, from their mouths only come *lies*. There’s simply no way to deny *it*, and every neurotypical is full of *shit*! Their unexamined lives aren’t worth *living*, hear the truth that we’re *ringing*, this isn’t hate speech, this is hate *singing*!”

I’m fairly certain that neurotypical is a synonym for bastard.

“I’m offended.” said the Australian serf.

“Imagine how offended you would be if people like you were only represented as jokes, children or freaks who need miracles to justify their existence. Just how exactly does the media diagnose school shooters? Suggesting that neurotypicals are instinctively deceitful is about as fair as saying autistics have no empathy, maybe even truer. Scientists have built their entire career on that claim. And by that I mean Simon Baron-Cohen.”

After the actors’ bows, Wakefield returned to the stage to justify his behavior, apologetically farting, “And that’s why I bullied a kid all the way through high school, and acted like her friend at the reunion!” Catching a bouquet of flowers from the audience, the actor broke character and tearfully said “[I want to dedicate this to any young person out there who feels misunderstood](#), rest assured that there will always be someone out there, willing to exploit the privileges prejudice denied you, to profit as they further those misunderstandings by misrepresenting you!”

The audience applauded explosively. Feeling as though a spotlight had fallen upon me, I sat with my fists clenched and my feet frozen. But after a second I had to stretch my left leg. I swung it backwards and hit something. I picked it up, it was a box. Inside there was a badge with a special message written on it: “I’m neurotypical - that just means I’m easier to replace!”

The American tapped my shoulder. “Mr. Haddon? I want to talk to you about the Monty Hall problem...”

I ran from the theater crying.

## Chapter 11

*[The Promise](#) performed by Guy Pearce*

The Monty Hall problem is a vital part of *The Curious Incident of The Dog in the Night-time*, a piece of textbook trivia that astounds the easily astounded. We're at a gameshow, and there are three doors with two goats and one car behind them. There's also a host in front of them, and he says that if you choose a door you get whatever is behind it. You choose a door and he opens one you didn't. He gives you the option of changing the door. Now the fun part of this story, and I hope you hear my nasal sneer of sarcasm as you're reading this, is that the chance of getting a car increases by a third if you choose the other door. I used this factoid in *Curious Incident* to impress the more credulous readers with my sheer mathulosity and distract them from my novel's numerous flaws in pacing, characterization and research.

But I suppose that it also shows that sometimes, changing one's mind can have a tangible benefit. Minds change. People change.

I don't want to think about that right now.

I can tell a joke.

An economist, a logician and a mathematician walk into a bar at the Scottish border.

"Ouch!" said the logician.

"Wow! A talking logician!" said the mathematician.

"A talking logician who?" said the economist.

"Just shut it, just shut up Charlotte!" said mathematician. "You know Anne's been going through a rough patch ever since her operation – can't you show a little compassion, or at least, a little tact?"

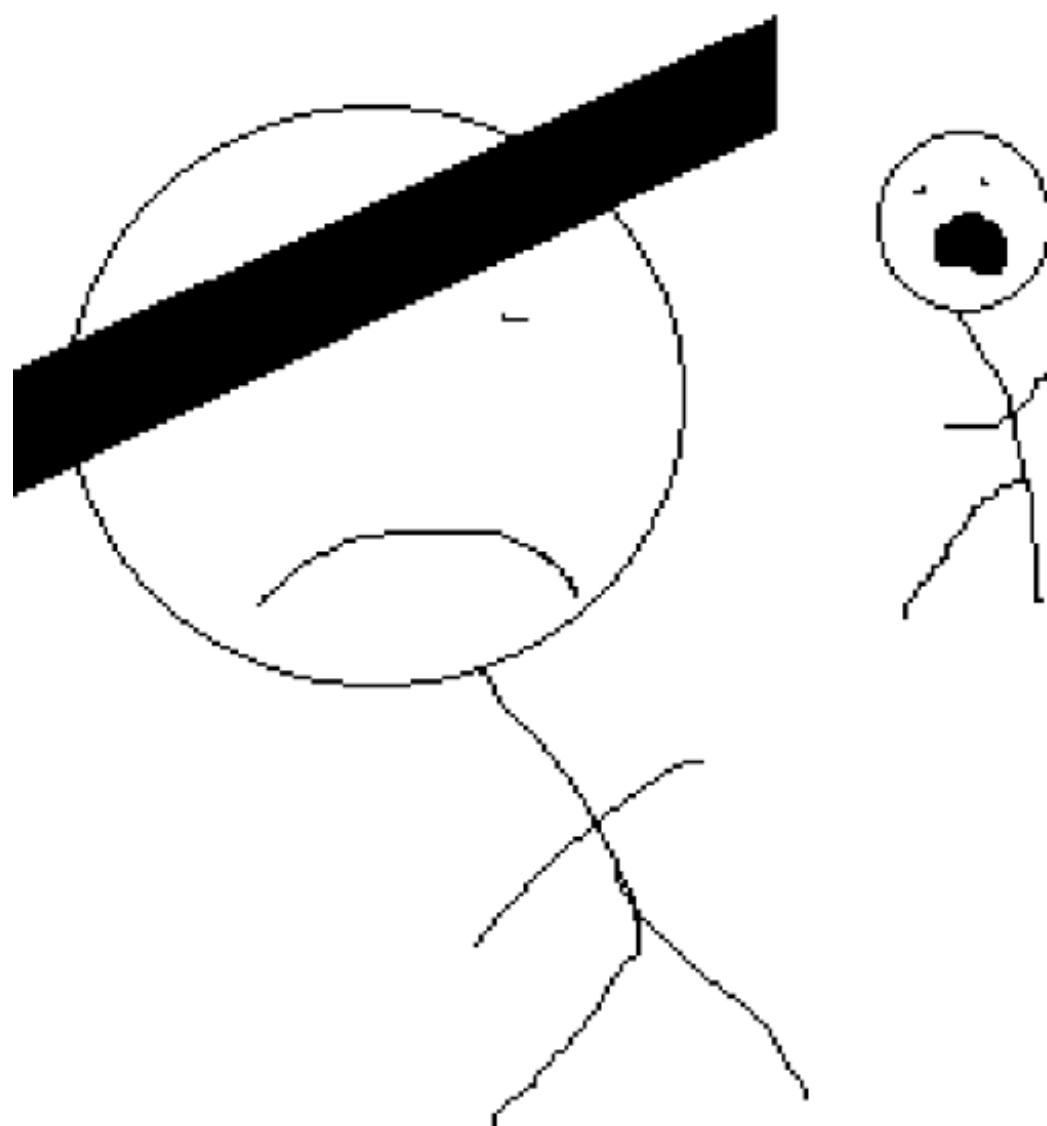
"My hen died today." said the economist. "She caught a rare virus from watching the television and starved to death. Turns out it spreads through flirting. I'm just a bit stressed, that's all."

"Why did the chicken cross the road?" said the logician.

"Why does anyone do anything?" said the economist. "To feel alive, I suppose."

This is funny because I cannot tell a joke.

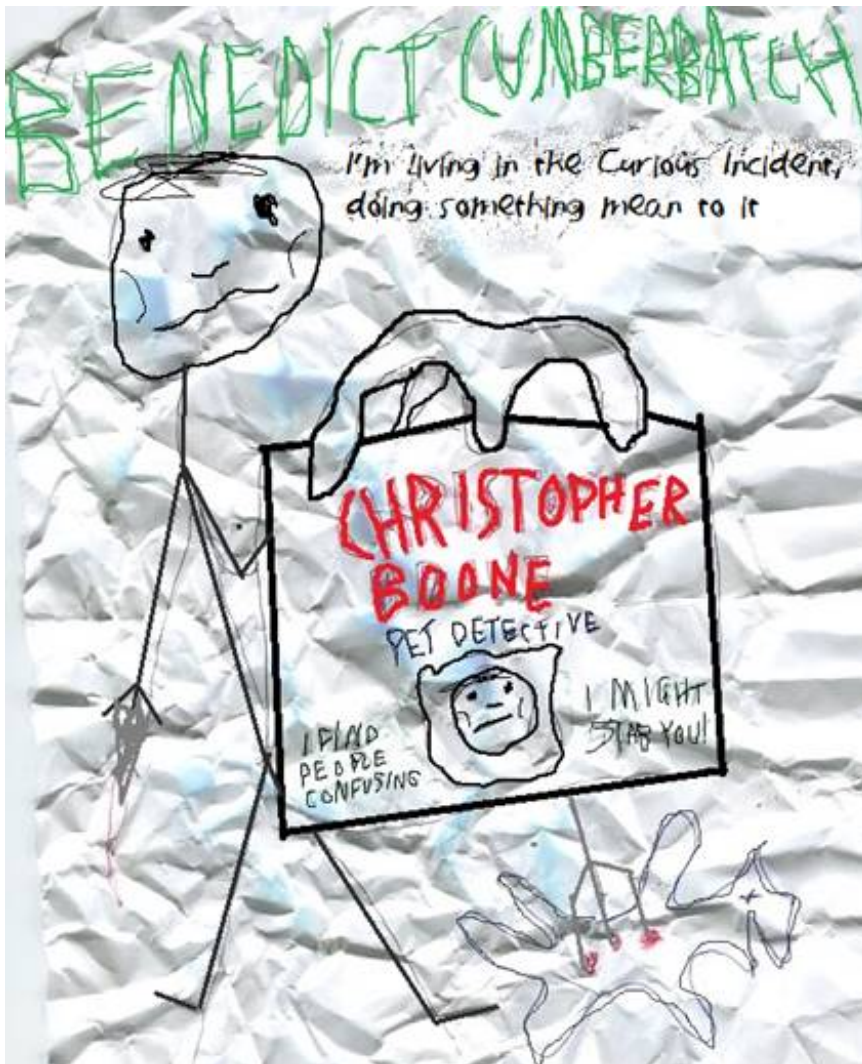
But seriously folks, any of you want to send me an letter on why I've gotten the Monty Hall problem wrong, go ahead. Being unnecessarily sarcastic to [earnest fans over the internet](#) is the closest thing to happiness I have. Each one is like a gasp of air to a drowning man.



## Chapter 12

[Gotta Knock A Little Harder](#) performed by the Seatbelts

It's not enough to remove the word "asperger's" from my book's blurb. And it is the act of a coward to hide disavowals of Christopher's semi-canonical diagnosis on my blog or in speeches at [book festivals](#). More people will read the novel. The last I saw of the perpetually upcoming cinematic adaption was some concept art [Steve Kloves](#) sent me, but if that film is ever made it will become the new *Rainman*.



The first step is to donate a quarter of the royalties from *The Curious Incident of The Dog in the Night-time* to the National Autistic Society. The second is to replace my infuriatingly smug post [aspergers & autism](#) with a disclaimer and a list of links to credible autism resources.

I'll call my people and demand that a new scene is inserted into the theatrical adaption and the film script. Christopher's father and his teacher will discuss the accommodations he will require to sit his A-levels. They will run through a brief definition of autism, make it clear that Christopher is not identical to all autistics, and subtly point the viewer towards further resources. If people expect my stupid little story to be educational it bloody well should be. Since I now apparently respect people with autism, I'll explicitly forbid any mention of autism or Aspergers in any publicity materials surrounding any iteration of *Curious Incident*, and strongly discourage it in any press

coverage.

I'll write a new foreword to the novel, expressing sentiments I've expressed elsewhere. My disclaimer will become an unavoidable part of ***Curious Incident***. Lying in my bath and balancing my laptop on my wobbly gut, I wrote a heartfelt plea to the reader not to mistake my novel for a documentary on autism. When you try your best, but you don't succeed. When you get what you want, but not what you need. When you feel so tired, but you can't sleep, stuck in reverse...

I saved the document. I left my bath to look at myself in the mirror. I saw a man I could respect, not just tolerate. I got back to the computer. I deleted the file. This is the seventh time I've done this. I poured myself another vodka.

*Thin Blue Flame* performed by Josh Ritter

It takes a real genius to figure out that there isn't an invisible grandfather in the sky who hates sex and fixes soccer matches while ignoring genocide.

GOD  
A Self-Portrait

*[The Second Coming](#) performed by The Waterboys*

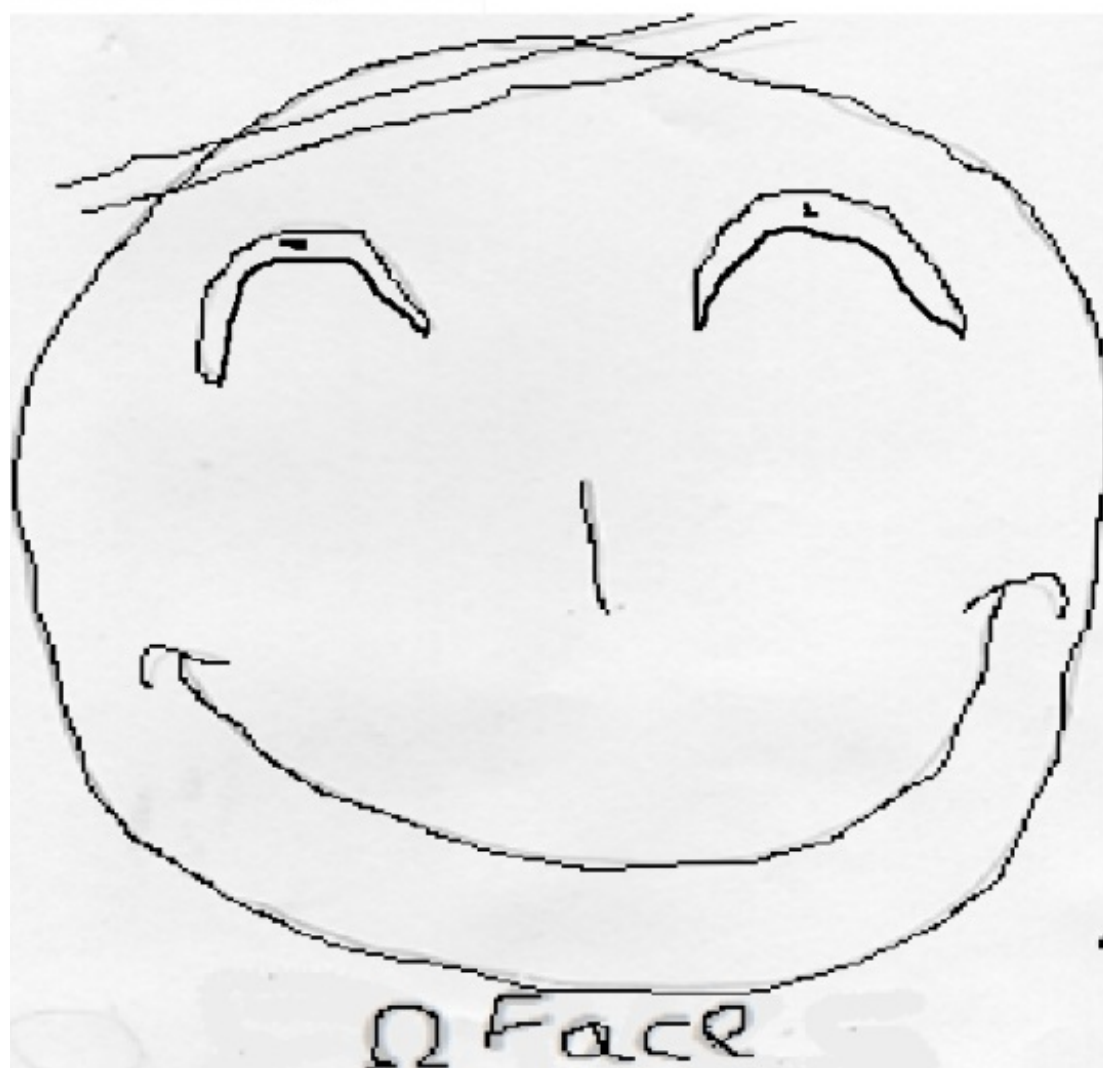
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There's no such thing as a normal religion, there's no such thing as a normal dream. Once, after drinking copious amounts of vodka, I had this nightmare where Terry Gilliam, [The Doctor, Q. Moriarty, and Christopher Boone](#) and some walking hammers [played Tetris at the Apollo Theatre](#), while I watched, slowly turning into straw. But as I slept in my bath that night, I was enraptured by the most delightful fantasy...

A virus kills everyone except me. [You get it from watching an infected person on television and then it spreads around the world really quickly. The infected sit on the sofa and do nothing and they don't eat or drink and so they die. Eventually there is no one left in the world.](#) Other Mark Haddons survive, but like okapi we Mark Haddons are a rare breed. When I hear an ecstatic yodel reverberate through the midnight jungle, or a self-serving rationalization rattle the slaughtered city, or a smug confession of ignorance bore the empty mine, or a self-pitying whimper trouble the peaceful desert I shall know that another Mark Haddon is near. We merge into a beauteous giant such as creation has never seen. With my second coming I shall impregnate the sun with ejaculate incandescent and father a new race of beings to devour. The Earth itself shall pass through my colon as I tighten a noose of nebulae around the solar system. Then I shall stitch together my writhing victims to write the following questions in the void where their home worlds once floated and when I set them ablaze my message shall blind the cosmos:

DOES THIS BOTHER YOU? DOES [CHAPTER 229](#) BOTHER YOU?

After resurrecting every dead soul I shall crush the universe into a quark of eternal torture and their infinite agony shall inspire an [orgasm](#) that is deliciously euphoric and agonizingly permanent. As I volcanically ejaculate into consciousness, I take a brief moment to reflect how much I love this fantasy, but what the hell, it's just fiction – right?!





*Nobody Home* performed by Pink Floyd

I spent the morning procrastinating. I hate writing most of the time. It shows in how short my chapters are and how frequently “and” appears in *Curious Incident*, because I’m always stopping and starting.

Halfway through writing my novel *Blood and Scissors*, about a transgender bank-robber solving a murder that had something to do with James Joyce, Caitlyn Jenner showed up on the cover of *Rolling Stone* and my agent called me to suggest that perhaps my unique brand of epistemology would not be appropriate for the subject. I, of course, disagreed, but publishers were equally cautious. Instead I began working on *Song of the Geordie*, the long awaited sequel to my acclaimed poetry collection *The Talking Horse and the Sad Girl and the Village Under the Sea*. Listen to this:

“I am a plum  
A dirty plum.  
I am a plum  
That’s what I um.”

I end up staring at my television, flicking between an interview with the world’s second most beautiful woman, Dame Edna Everage, and a hauntingly accurate documentary about a Japanese man who emigrated to America during the sixties, called *Breakfast At Tiffany’s*. By the time the film has finished, I was so hungry that I hallucinate that I’m watching a show about singing potatoes. What hellish world could birth such a production? Has there ever been a producer who, glancing down at his dinner, commented to his wife “You know Uta, I like my bangers and mash as the next woman, but the potato element of the equation would be radically improved if they were singing simple melodies at me in the voice of a prepubescent child.” And what sort of BBC Controller, precariously perched upon his throne of television licenses, would nod seriously at such a suggestion? Surely such a cosmos can only exist shimmering on the cornea of a madman; surely my body’s way of telling me it needed something in it.

I look into my pantry and groan. I’m always peeling the labels off my food packaging, because labels say nothing about food. A label might be useful for a nutritionist, but I need to ignore certain facts about a meal - like whether it contains horse meat - before I can truly accept it. (My views on this matter has nothing to do with the choice labels applied to me by irate reviewers.)

Adding a sense of tension to my diet is the fact that I have no way of knowing if the food I eat has expired, since I scribble over all the labels I can’t peel. Rather than risk another food explosion or stomach supernova, I decide that it is safer to slope unto the gloomy streets of Oxford to search for something soft and warm to put in my mouth.

I noticed something curious about the people I passed. Hags pointed. Street urchins laughed. A trio of desolate chavs performed a mocking dance that involved plucking coins from the air and shrugging. No one looked at me as though I were a man worthy of their respect.

At Tesco’s, poor quality paperbacks were stacked high on the counter where the Smarties should have been. Picking one up, I saw the worst cover art I’ve even seen.



The pages were unevenly cut and inconsistently numbered. The cover's ink smudged under the warmth of my thumb and typos made the worst pages incomprehensible.

"You!" spat the old man behind the counter. "Are you going to buy the book or fondle it?"

I fumbled with my wallet. "Ah yes, I should probably read it. And I'd like to get a cinnamon roll as well."

I sat on a bench at a nearby park and ate the roll, after carefully removing any identifying labels. With dread churning in my stomach I scanned the paperback's blurb, identical to the one the diabolical firefighter read to me. "Mark Barnum Haddon knows nothing of any country besides Britain and isn't entirely sure what a prime number is." The critics' endorsements on the front pages were sickeningly sycophantic.

"A hyperreal window into how a Mark Haddon might actually think!" – Captain [Raymond Baudrillard](#).

"Without using the words 'disingenuous' or 'exploitative', Bakhtin skilfully traces an intricate portrait of a technically decent yet pompously dull man tortured by his poor decisions, those same mistakes that make his name worth mentioning in the first place. A joyous tour de force of hatred!" – Fire Commissioner Sheldon Bradbury.

"And herein lies the brilliance of Siobhan Bakhtin's choice of narrator: The most vexing of epistemological questions are mulled over by a Thatcherite solipsist with less integrity than a

telephone psychic. *Who Let The Dogs Out?* is one of the finest debuts in years: a violently cathartic satire, a Molotov cocktail for a literary glass house, an eclectic multimedia extravaganza, a mind-searing masterwork whose true meaning will be fiercely debated for generations to come. Truly essential reading!“ [Norman Price](#), aged seven.

The author’s bio was little better. “Siobhan Bakhtin, star of the Oxford fire department, is now better known as Swindon’s foremost theatrical genius, autistic supremacist and all-round Übermensch. In her spare time, she enjoys working on a prenatal test for future [former CEOs of NBC](#) and writing the epic fan fiction *Neville Longbottom and The Methods of Sex Positive Sex-Ed*, as well as getting banned from internet forums.”

Aware that I’d have to read the whole damn book, I decided to sample a random chapter. I braced myself and read Chapter 29.

## Chapter Twenty Nine

*[The Sun Always Shines at Midnight](#) mashed by Wax Audio*

It was two minutes to midnight. Heroic as she was subtle, Sue Blue spent her night shift ferociously filing files at her fire station.

“Oh dear.” cried Commissioner Bradbury. “We’ve just received intel that someone is planning to let the dogs out of our famous Oxford boarding kennels.”

“Cease your sorrows of sissiness!” screamed Sue decisively. “I will go there to unite justice with power to prevent this great evil!”

“Fine,” wept Commissioner Bradbury like a newborn orphan. “Just don’t beat anyone up. Again.”

“Yes boss!” saluted Sue, musing to herself that it was impossible to socialize without lies.

Sue drove her car down to the kennels, but it was too slow so she threw a pebble at a helicopter. It crashed and when she showed her license to the pilot inside he refused to lend his vehicle. So she head-butted him until he agreed and thanked her for borrowing his helicopter. Sue could only hope her helicopter was zippy-fast enough.

Meanwhile, Mark Haddon meditated furiously as he watched the puppies cavort from the shadows, hard with smugness as all the furry babies would soon be scattered to the breeze like a sneeze.

“When that timer I’ve placed on gates explodes, it shall restore my relevance whilst assuring my alibi!” he eloquently snickered. “I’ll stab the next person who makes me uncomfortable and I wish that everyone was dead.”

He danced the Markarena under the spectral branches of an elm tree made from oak. “Mark Haddon doesn’t research, cos he’s a lazy git, this I know for sure. But does he sometimes wonders, bout why his self-esteem went out the door...”

The Markarena!



A single tear ran down Sue's face with mournful athleticism as she back-flipped from her slaloming helicopter and saw that the puppies had been expelled from their paradisiacal sanctuary into the merciless wasteland beyond. Into the chaotic cosmos swirling above she yodelled, "For this foul atrocity, this unmanly shadow will mourn his conception seven aeons after his name is forgotten!"

"Who says I don't already?" burped Mark Haddon, lurking by the kennels' gates like a mushroom in a shower.

"You...!" shrieked Sue, righteousness exploding in her piercing brown eyes. "Who let the dogs out?"

"Excuse me?" sassed Mark Haddon.

"Was it you?"

"Wasn't me!"

"I'm going to have to take you down to the station for questioning," hollered Sue.

Mark Haddon reached into his shorts for his butter knife and gasped when he looked up to see Sue holding its broken halves in her large hands.

“Come now! Or should I use excessive force?” she howled professionally.

Mark Haddon hissed and flailed his arms in the air as though he were trying to sell cars. Sue took no notice, instead reading aloud from a study on [sexuality](#).

“You dare bring research into my lair?!” Mark Haddon collapsed into a foetal position, crying.

“The research! It burns!”

“Bazinga motherfucker!!” Sue thundered, her suave words of judgement echoing throughout the empty kennels with the deft finality of an atomic bomb. “This is what you get; this is what you get when you mess with us.”

As Sue handcuffed him, the criminal mastermind whimpered one last request.

“Before you interrogate me, please let me go to the little author’s room!” Mark Haddon coughed with all the virility of a lettuce.

*Fix You* performed by Coldplay

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There's something deeply unnerving about having your life narrated by someone who clearly despises you.

*Who Let the Dogs Out?* is the worst book I have ever read. What sort of creep spreads misinformation about real people? Surely deliberately disseminating misleading material, to the point that it becomes a bestseller, must be considered immoral. And I can tell that she's getting a real voyeuristic thrill, exploiting my differences for comedy and making me act out of character to push her unremarkable ideological agenda. But the most offensive part of Siobhan Bakhtin's book is how it just isn't very good. If it were funny or illuminating I could forgive her for caricaturing me, yet remove the caricature and all you've got left is a banal story full of petty, unlikeable characters and the tedious messes they've got themselves in. Not to mention the implausible dialogue tags, hyperbolic action sequences and the gratuitous metafictional asides that add nothing to the final product but an air of postmodern pretentiousness that will only alienate mainstream audiences. Anyone who thinks this book accurately represents me is an ignoramus who would rather engage with a fictional character than the person they misrepresent. If I ever met such a



person, I would throw them out the fucking window.

The pictures are rubbish as well.

I've heard similar sentiments about *Curious Incident*. It had one bad review from a [young man with Asperger's](#) who thought the book was bad, mainly because Christopher wasn't like any people he knew with Asperger's. The important thing was that parents with children with autism liked it. And the two books are completely different. People with autism are routinely discriminated against by job interviews and other unfair hiring practices, persecuted in schools, and [on average die eighteen years earlier than their normal peers](#). Me? I'm a bestselling author virtually guaranteed a platform to air whatever trivial grievance I have. There is no similarity between the slanderous nastiness of *Who Let the Dogs Out?* with the literary classiness that is *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*.

"I daresay that when you publish a bestseller that defames a minority famed for their genius and passion, something like *Who Let The Dogs Out?* becomes inevitable." I looked up to see the American critic from *Unexamined Lives* swaggering out from the [sperm bank](#) across the road, a beatific smile playing on his thin lips and a dog-eared [Playboy](#), with Jenny McCarthy on the cover, rolled under his arm. "Still, I didn't completely and utterly despise your worthless book. My mom left a copy lying around the house. The part where Christopher has a meltdown in the train station was one of the most accurate depictions of sensory overload I have encountered in literature. All those bold italic letters..."

Finally, some praise! I'm happy someone acknowledged my hard work photographing train stations. With all the animosity I've been getting from the public, I was beginning to feel like Oxford's answer to Salman Rushdie. I watch as the critic unfolds a world map from his pocket and ticks Britain. With mounting horror I realize that North America and half of Europe were covered in similar ticks, with two in Italy.

"You do not need to die as the man who exploited autism to become rich and famous, loved only by those who don't know any better." The critic talked as if he was reciting a script. "If you are upset about how Siobhan Bakhtin portrayed you, the best thing you could do is prove her wrong by doing your own research." He handed me a slip of paper covered in a sequence of numbers and letters, a reference number for a library book. "You live in a town whose name is synonymous with academia. If you can blog, you can Google. You have no excuse not to do your own research."

I told him how Siobhan Bakhtin engineered an elaborate scenario where I would be forced to wipe my morrison with a copy of *The Curious Incident of The Dog in the Night-time*, a most upsetting experience. Even if I had fallen into her disgusting trap it would say nothing about me as a person, the blame would be on her.

The critic waved my completely legitimate description of abuse away. "Is it not true that a novel greater than *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* is written every time a [morrison](#) is wiped? Go to the library and I'll give you a puppy for Christmas or something."



*America: What Time Is Love* performed by The KLF



Here is the map I drew with my unique brand of epistemology.

London is England, an overpriced mausoleum of its former relevance. If East Cheam is the balls of the British Empire and Swindon its arsehole, then surely Oxford is its stomach. Before the last war we suffered from a psychiatric condition called geokleptomania and our more erudite sons were afflicted with bibliokleptomania, the ancient books they stole still waiting in the Bodleian Library where they graze on time like monsters in a zoo. We Englishmen have no souls or shadows.

To the south England fades into Scotland. The Scottish are exactly like us except everyone wears batter and talks in a Scottish accent. Wales forms a distant archipelago to the west, where everyone wears latex and talks in an [accent as sexy](#) as a [dinosaur's thigh](#). To the north lies France, which is the least exotic you can get while still being exotic, Europe, who we're trying to pull out of without much success, Africa, which we pulled out of without much success, and Australia, who beg and beg us not to pull out. Australia is a nation that has no moral right to exist because every single Australian is a complete and utter wanker.

To the east and west of us lies America, like a boa constrictor with a messiah complex. They are like us before the war. But they've sublimated their geokleptomania into global cultural hegemony, arming their future enemies and preaching the rights of children while bombing them. Americans have two heads: one for doing nothing about gun control and the other for praying.

But their northern neighbors are so cool that they can cut glass with their nipples.

And at the North Pole lives Santa, and at the South Pole Satan, but really they both live at both, because the world is round and the world map joins up at the top and bottom.

Everything I've said here is as researched as anything in *The Curious Incident of The Dog in the Night-time*. If I can say that [imagination always trumps research](#) and be taken seriously, does that mean I can do anything?

*Perfect Day* performed by Lou Reed and others

The ancient wooden doors of the Bodleian library were covered in the names of local colleges and set in a stone archway. I'd rather do the cha-cha with a crocodile than step through them.

I stepped through them.

The main foyer was a large room filled with chatting students and computers. At home I printed out a map indicating where the book would be, the northwest quadrant of the second floor.

There was young lady with a lanyard hanging around her neck, to whom I said "Excuse me, can you help me find this book?"

"Sure." she said in a helpful voice before looking up at my face. "Actually, why don't you just ask your imagination?"

The librarian walked away.

I went up the stairs, struggling past the crush of students. Eventually I found the floor that matched my map.

My god. It was full of books.

*In Authenticity* by U. R. Lacan and *Missing Numbers* by Samuel Oak and *Firelight!* by Sam Myers and *Fear and Loafing In Llan gwydd* by Hunter S. Jones and *The Ivory Throne* by Joe Priapus and *Mirror Boys* by Prince Dastan and *The Bitcoin Opera* by Martha Focault and *Show Trials* by Aristotle Lloyd Webber and *Barred* by Moe Sizlack and *The Constipated Dawn* by Nicholas Flambé and *The Self-Evident Life of Captain Obvious* by Seth Evident and *How I Learned To Stop Worrying and Love Hate* by Davros and *Possible Publications* by Jorge Luis Bottomham and *Who Let the Dogs Out?* by S. Bakhtin and *Challenge* by Richard Head and *Imaginary Places, Invisible Faces* by Irrational Geographic and *Back 2 Heaven* by Lou Scousafer and *Christopher's Book* by C. Boone and *Decolonising Autism Studies* by Peggy Smith and finally *A Partridge* by Pia Tree.

Finally I stood before the shelf aisle in which my book waited. The last obstacle was the subtly villainous Australian from the play, his impermeable black Gore-Tex jacket straining to contain his iron muscles. From his left earlobe hung an ear-ring shaped like an ankh; a bit tasteless, but who am I to judge? His pale complexion contrasted with his jet-black hair to generate a sort of business-goth vibe. As I observed him, he was standing perfectly still, checking his [Twitter](#), waiting. Just waiting.

"Can I go past? I need a book." I asked.

The sneaky Australian cleared his throat and said, "Once upon a time there was a great queen called Suzanne."

Speaking in his almost incomprehensible accent, he told me some preposterous fable about a powerful queen who added more and more jewels to her crown until she was crushed by its weight. [I took my Swiss Army knife out of my shorts and got out the saw blade, wanting to hit](#)

somebody or stab them with my Swiss Army knife, but there wasn't anyone to hit or stab with my Swiss Army knife except the Australian and he was very tall and if I hit him or stabbed him with my Swiss Army knife he would try to hit me. Maybe if he attacked me and I killed him it will be self-defence and I won't go to prison.

The disreputable Australian's fable ground to a close. "And the messenger says to the queen, 'There's good news and there's bad news. I'll give the bad news first, the bad news is that the bad guys won. The good news? We are the bad guys.' The queen weeps."

The rascal exhales before continuing. "You know, I think we all learned something here today. Imagination and research both have their places, but one should never be substituted for the other. I mean, with imagination you can imagine-" He motioned for me to finish his sentence.

"Horses galloping on tomatoes, an almost infinite amount of heterosexual relationships, people hunting murderers, medieval Europe but with slightly more magic uhhh..."

"That's right, Mark Haddon, you can imagine all those things. And you know that research is very important. Why, you've already done some research today! That little map in your hand, isn't that research?"

"I guess it is."

"You couldn't very well find your way to this place with just your imagination, could you? Theoretically you could imagine a perfect map, but you'd be unable to determine its accuracy with just your imagination."

"Listen," I said, "If I admit that 'imagination always trumps research' was a stupendously-self-serving-silly thing to say will you please let me pass?"

"Yes," the Australian said.

"Well I won't, I won't buckle down to your bullying." I cleared my throat, having just thought of something really clever to say. "What you people fail to understand is that although we live in an age obsessed with documentaries, with biographies, with investigative journalism, we often forget that you can have all the facts but be no nearer the truth."

Checkmate, I thought to myself.

The Australian frowned as though a wombat had drowned in his pool. "Can you please reword that sentiment in a way that doesn't make you sound like a religious apologist posing as an intellectual?"

Damn. "Facts, well, you know what facts are, good ol' qualitative and quantitative, statistics gathered from surveys and quotations from minds wise and the other kind, theories substantiated by empirical evidence, you know, facts!" I tapped my nose to emphasize the point. "But truth! Now that's a whole different kettle of fish! A nauseatingly numinous knowledge of entirety nibbling the neighborhood of the noosphere-"

"You're babbling." said the Australian. "If only Richard Dawkins could see you now. He'd cringe so hard he'd fold in half like an ironing board."

"Naa-aah!" I countered. "I don't give a damn what Dawkins thinks. Besides, I'm an atheist in a very religious mould. I'm always asking myself the big questions. Where did we come from? Is there a meaning to all of this?"

"What? What?" the Australian stammered. "Next you'll be telling me you're spiritual but not

religious! We come from evolution and we choose our own meanings. As for being atheist in a religious mode, I think that term applies better to [Buddhist](#) or [Maoists](#)."

I wave my palm in a limpid movement of equivocation. "I don't know what you're talking about. Being an atheist means I don't believe in God, nothing more."

"That's technically true. Atheists act in all sorts of ways. Some are complete muppets," the Australian glared at me, "while others are compassionate. Me? Three years ago I ran up to a creationist student and dumped a dead fish on his plate to make a point about the scientific method."

["I'm a hard-line atheist!"](#) I blurt out.

"What does a hard-line atheist look like?" asked the Australian. "Do they sing hymns and mouth the lines about God? Do they act like atheism is a profound mind-blowing revelation? Are they convinced that imaginations trumps research?"

"Err." I said, unprepared for this line of questioning.

"In our current cultural climate, 'hard-line atheist' refers to someone who want cults to pay tax, to stay out of schools and be held to the same standards as any other organization. They'd boast about their honesty and integrity. Have you got integrity?"

"Look," I muttered. "*Curious Incident* was my big break - I'm nothing without it! Authors submit manuscripts all the time without expecting to get published, sometimes we feel it's worth taking risks we shouldn't! I started with the [dead dog](#), I could think of nothing funnier, and later I drew from my minimal experience of the disabled to weave an autistic caricature around the whole thing. I ignored the first criticisms and, I was just so invested in the novel, I practically *was* *Curious*. So when I said imagination always trumps research, that was a posthumous rationalization, a sunk cost fallacy, subconsciously channeling some vacuous goon from *Thought for the Day*. Atheism, no Brit cares about atheism or religion anymore, I just wanted to be mildly controversial. *Curious* fans don't care, I don't want to insult anyone but the main reason the book was so popular was that it was an opportunity for people who don't read often to read a children's book and think they'd partaken of some serious adult literature. The pictures, the prime numbers, the gimmicks never hurt but they never helped either, a glib flash in the pan - but there's a reason no one wears 3D goggles at the cinema anymore. Please don't make me the scapegoat of your crusade, I'm just a disingenuous hack who got lucky, don't make me an example, blame Random House's marketing department and the free market for the success of my shitty novel, not me. All humans deserve dignity, imagination always trumps research is a stupendously-self-servingly-stupid thing to say."

"Haddon, you are an example!" laughed the repugnant Australian. "You are an example of an author who had to get it wrong before they got it right! One day the scholars of the future may place your name next to [Diane Duane](#), and while critics will compare *Curious Incident* to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or damn it alongside *Song of the South*, at the very least they'll acknowledge the author's change of heart in their condemnatory forewords. Go, Mark Haddon, go pull your finger out!"

And with that the atavistic Australian barreled out of my sight.

Now that I was alone, I could search the shelves for my book. I found it: *The Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome* by Tony Attwood. There was a bookmark in a chapter about humor, where Attwood writes "[I know many teenagers with Asperger's Syndrome who create abundant jokes, although sometimes I'm not sure what I am supposed to be laughing at.](#)" I felt similarly

disorientated, flipping through this complete guide and finding something on every page that showed how staggeringly inaccurate *Curious Incident* is. Then a heavy book fell from the highest shelf, bounced off my head and landed on the floor, opening on a chapter titled ['Autistic psychopathy' in Childhood](#) by someone named Hans Asperger. A glance at a single paragraph was as overpowering as a staring contest with the brightest sun. It changed me completely.

I dashed out of the second floor, panicked down to the first floor, stomped onto the ground floor, flung open the door, fell onto my knees and puked my guts onto the pavement. The library users ignored me. For the last thirteen years I've been carrying a copy of *Curious Incident* with me. I lifted it up in the air, and with my other hand I set the book aflame with the cigarette lighter I keep on me for when the knife isn't enough.

"This book is not a window into the world of autism!" I shout the disclaimer which I've written seven times, and that I now fully intend to insert into all future editions of *Curious Incident*. "This book is fiction. [I hear that it has been used as a textbook for social workers, and for policemen. I never meant it to be a textbook.](#) Claiming that you understand autism after reading this book is like claiming to be an art historian after reading *The Da Vinci Code*.

"I hear that people are saying, 'If you want to work out how to treat people on the spectrum, read this novel'. I hear people say, 'I've got Asperger's, my family have never understood me but I gave them your book and it opened a window'. I say, 'I wish the people in your life had been able to make the leap of imagination to understand your world without having to go into a bookshop and buy a book'. Praising this book as an accurate representation of autism is another way of admitting that you don't actually care about the views of real autistics.

["In retrospect I realise that some of the people I worked with had autism, although they had it much more seriously than Christopher does.](#) This does not make me an autism expert. The real autism experts aren't doctors or even parents. They are autistics themselves. If being related to an autistic makes you an expert on autism, then my mother makes me expert on giving birth. If you must learn about autism from a book, read [\*Carrying Autism, Feeling Language\*](#) by Lucy Blackman or [\*A Survival Guide For People Living With Asperger's Syndrome\*](#) by Marc Segar. And you simply can't go past the [many wonderful blogs written by autistics](#). For those entirely new to autism, there is no better page than the [\*Thinking Person's Guide to Autism\*](#). With all of these credible resources freely available to anyone with a modem, relying on a fictional story written by a man who [actively avoids research](#) as your definitive representation of autism is extraordinarily naive.

"Autism is not a literary device for exploring the foibles of the modern world or the hypocrisies of 'normal' people, and using it as such is exploitative. My regret that it took me thirteen years to realize this is more than slight. If this book has spread any misconceptions or negative stereotypes about autism, I can only apologize."

The crowd applauded, and with a slow clap Siobhan emerged from the mob.

"I have confession of my own." she said, holding *Who Let the Dogs Out?* in the air. "This book is libel." The diabolical firefighter touched her paperback to mine, sharing its flame.

"A quarter of all future royalties from *Curious Incident* will be donated to the National Autism Society." I said, before something inside me clicked. "Another quarter will fund grants for autistic artists, whether they be filmmakers, writers or musicians. It will be my way of standing up for difference, and helping mainstream audiences understand outsiders who see the world in surprising and revealing ways. And finally, I will make it so that future productions of the *Curious Incident* play are contractually obliged to give autistic actors first priority when casting



Christopher, regardless of race or gender. The film will have an autistic lead or else it will not be made.”

The crowd of gawking students was electrified into a whooping applause. To be honest, *Curious Incident* is so toxic that mandating an autistic lead would be about as helpful as painting a cactus yellow and calling it a banana. Rewriting my stupid little story to make it accurate would mean destroying it and replacing it with a better story, which would be any story, really. Still, if I can’t erase my novel from history, I should at least prove that I value autistic perspectives.

Siobhan snatched the burning book out of my hand and tossed it into my vomit, dashed back into the library and shortly returned carrying a bundle of books, which she placed close enough to my burning *Curious Incident* so that they too caught the flame. I can only see a few titles, and fewer names that I can recognize. *Callous Disregard: Autism and Vaccines - The Truth Behind a Tragedy* by Andrew Wakefield, *Teaching Developmentally Disabled Children: The Me Book* by Ole Ivor Lovass, *The Wright Stuff: From NBC to Autism Speaks* by Bob Wright and Diane Mermigas, eleven blue puzzle pieces that Siobhan referred to as “innocuous swastikas”, several books with the word empathy in the title and all [one hundred and eighty editions](#) of *Curious Incident*. It seems as though everything that has ever offended Siobhan has a place on the fire. The American critic stepped out from the crowd and hesitantly tossed in [sixty six](#) copies of *House Rules*. As for the fire itself, I managed to light it up blue by pouring all the vodka from my hip-flask onto it.

After every other relic has been turned to ash, only one book rises phoenix-like from the sapphire flames: *The Rosie Project*. I later learned that the page with the book club questions, which suggested that the reader participate in a fundraising walk for Autism Speaks, had been completely cremated by the cerulean combustion.

The critic walked over to me and shook my hand. “Book burning was the hallmark of the some of the most oppressive regimes in history, but in this instance I think I’ll let it slide!”

[“The assumption is that I should be morally affronted when this happens but the truth is that it always generates a really interesting debate among school kids and librarians and parents, not just about Curious, but about literature and freedom and language, and this is an undeniably good thing.”](#) Protestations of free speech are disingenuous when they are spouted by the privileged to defend their dehumanization of the disenfranchised. Those who shout ‘free speech’ loudest often need it the least. If book burning is a cure for well-meaning bigotry than let those pages fry. This is wonderful.” I paused for breath. “Yesterday I was sucking a lemon, but now everything is its right place. I am born again.”

Yesterday I was an unremarkable author who found fame writing exploitative drivel, who autism-baited yet denied his true intentions as soon as his credibility was questioned. I used to be so insubstantial that I was outweighed by my own shadow. If the man I was three weeks ago was linked to a story describing my recent life, he would have responded by linking back to his ludicrously uncaptialised [autism and aspergers](#) post and refusing to participate in any further conversation, if he responded at all.

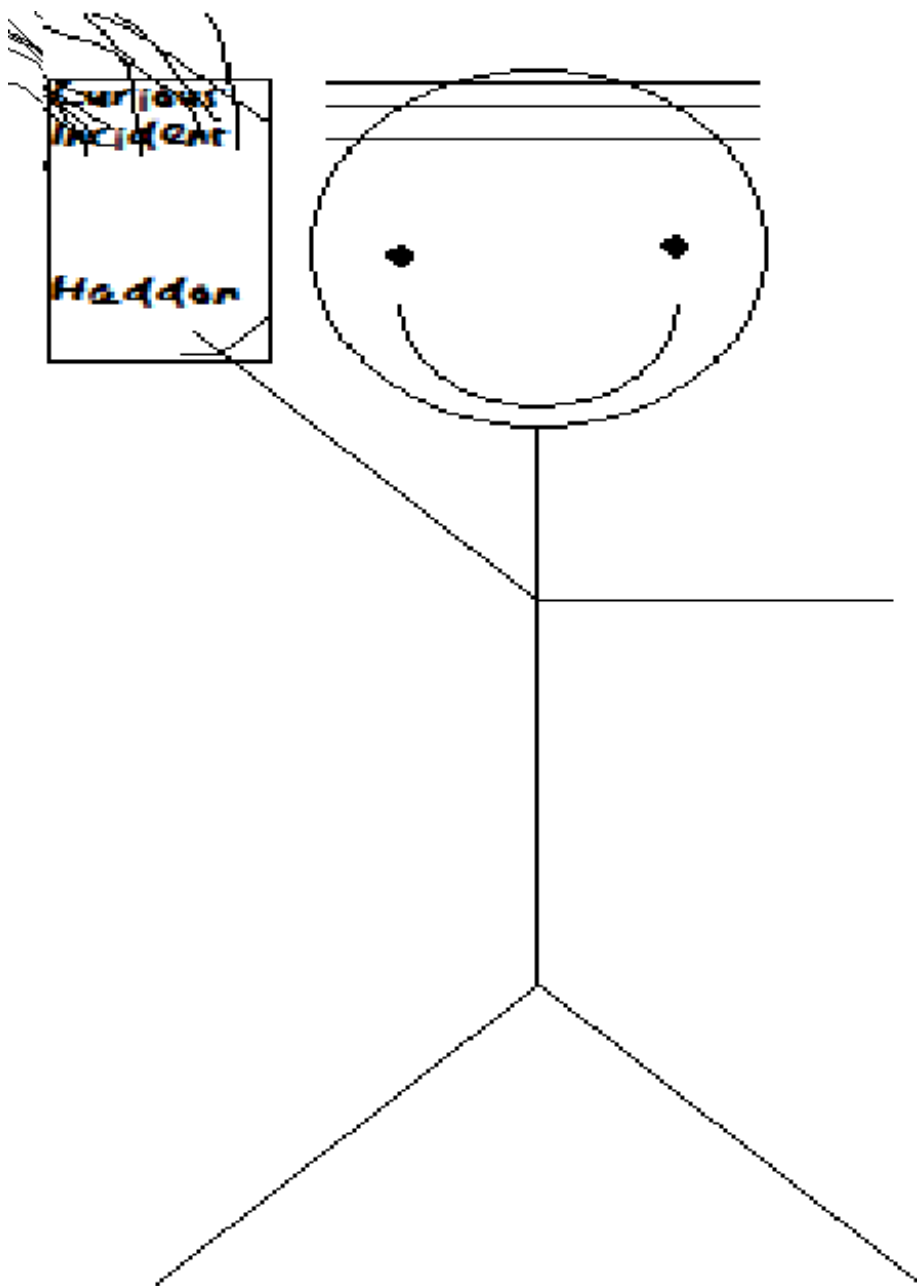
Not anymore.

Warming his hands on the fire, the American asks the dialogical firefighter “Did you ever find out who let the dogs out?”

“Dogs? The dogs were never important. What matters is how we can begin our history again, not written by self-serving scientists or patronizing parents, but by actual autistics. We’ll be alright.”

The same goes for me. I have slept in a bath for the last twelve years, yet only five minutes ago was I truly cleansed.

I am a man you can respect and my name is Mark Haddon.





## Appendix

Even I, Mark Haddon, know that if you've met one autistic, you've met one autistic. They aren't exactly monolithic. [Some](#) actually [liked](#) *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, and they are my only fans whose opinions have any validity. Seeing how it's easy enough to find gushing praise for my novel, I've scoured the internet for some more accurate criticisms.

- [Elizabeth Bartmess](#), in the most authoritative review of my novel ever written, writes that *Curious* normalizes the abuse of autistics.
- [Greg Olear](#) called my novel irresponsible fiction in the *Huffington Post* before going on to encapsulate my former self in one insult at [Chronogram](#).
- [Richard Cooper](#), the best critic you've never heard of, blames the publicity surrounding my novel for the way it has spread harmful autism stereotypes.
- [Eric Y. Chen](#) thinks my novel presents a very inauthentic depiction of autism.
- [Fission Mailure](#) praises my writing but not what I write about.
- [Vevacha](#) suggests that Christopher Boone wouldn't be so offensive if he was a demon.
- [Ellenandjim](#) call my novel a cruel and hollow caricature.
- [Tvtropes](#) has a review written by an autistic that calls my novel obnoxious.
- [Ray Jobling](#), in a lecture on disability, states that my novel and *Rainman* are widely hated by autistics.
- [Amanda Forest Vivian](#) resents being compared to the omniscient protagonist of my novel, thinks that the way I talked over his head to the reader was exploitative and rightly complains that *Curious* is more popular than autistic autobiographies.
- [The Guardian](#) has an article by Sara Barrett, which says that books like *Curious Incident* made her feel that nobody would ever love her because of her autism.
- [Neuroatypicality](#) describes how disturbing reading *Curious Incident* at school can be for an autistic student.
- [DisabilityNow](#) has an article on autism novels that doesn't directly focus on my book, but it's telling that the author Penny Gotch knew she'd hate a particular novel because the cover compared it to mine.
- [Amazon](#) has a crop of one-star reviews that correctly castigate my novel for its non-existent research and spectacularly shitty misrepresentation.
- [Goodreads](#) has a similar collection, including [this review](#), a hauntingly accurate portrait of

me, a window into my mind, if you will.

- [Here](#) is the collection of *Tumblr* posts insulting me, that I'm curating as a sort of penance.

Hopefully any student unfortunate enough to have *The Curious Incident Of The Dog In The Night-Time* on their curriculum will be able to make use of the above resources to write an essay that eviscerates my book and persuades the teacher to only refer to it in derogatory terms. And if *Curious Incident* must be taught in schools, the Bartmess essay would make a marvelous contextualizing statement.

I'll happily remove anyone from the above list if they request it. It's entirely reasonable for a real person to feel uncomfortable being praised by a sketchy character like myself. There's something cold and violent about me, whether I'm fantasizing [that somewhere in London my former agent is being beaten stoutly with a hardback copy of \*Curious Incident\*](#) or laughing at murdered dogs, that I mask with my so-called black humor. A vein of loveless misanthropy runs through *Curious Incident*, permitted to me by ignorant readers due to the alleged autism of my protagonist. To write a heartless character is to give oneself permission to write heartless things; perhaps I do want the world to die. If I've missed any good reviews or articles in the above list, please send them to me!

The play generally received better reviews than its source material, although that may be because people who hated my book would be unwilling to pay a large sum of money to see it pantomimed on stage. Or maybe it was all the pretty lights - any theater director looking to make a reputation for themselves ought to mount a production without the special effects and see if audiences still love it. (*Christopher Boone: Unplugged*, if you will.) This [critic](#) would go see it, at least. It is entirely possible that the play is actually good, formed like a pearl over my turd of a novel.

The controversy over whether an autistic teenager should be played by an autistic teenager or some privileged neurotypical wonderboy has been covered by [Howlround](#) and the [Village Voice](#). There was even a [petition](#). [Chavisory](#) has a good take on the situation, and the Broadway critic [Clyde Fitch](#) is sympathetic to the autistics agitating for a casting change while questioning their goal.

The director admits that "[I thought about bringing](#) [an actual real-life autistic person] [into the rehearsal process but after a while I realised Christopher is probably not completely accurate because he has too many traits on the spectrum](#)," inadvertently articulating a common [autistic criticism](#) of *Curious* before doing precisely fuck-all to prevent her play from being touted as an accurate representation of spectrum. The other concerning thing about the play is that apparently [audience members laugh at Christopher's meltdowns](#), a clear display of that marvelous neurotypical empathy to which all autistics must aspire.

I'll be working behind the scenes to ensure that the mooted *Curious Incident* film remains, like Dante's vision of Satan, frozen in development Hell next to the people who use 'autistic' as an insult and those who use 'network' as a verb. Should I fail, a lifetime of phone calls inviting me to speak at autism conferences and a barrage of letters about the Monty Hall problem are the best I deserve.

**Illegitimi non carborundum!**

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